

For people with Alzheimer’s or dementia living in assisted living memory care communities, gardens help reduce symptoms of dementia, according to a new study.

At Autumn Leaves of West Houston, Texas, the garden offers therapeutic benefits for residents affected by Alzheimer’s or other forms of dementia. The garden at the assisted living memory care community’s keeps residents safe and active, while helping reduce symptoms of dementia such as agitation or confusion.

A new study reveals that gardens may offer therapeutic benefits for people in senior residences who are living with dementia.

That’s no surprise to the staff at Autumn Leaves of West Houston, an assisted living memory care community devoted to residents with Alzheimer’s or other forms of dementia located.

“Our residents really enjoy our garden,” said Taryn Jasmon, Executive Director of Autumn Leaves of West Houston. “The meditative rhythm of gardening seems to help reduce the confusion and disorientation that affect many people with memory loss.”

The [study](#), published online on July 14, 2014 in the *Journal of the American Medical Directors Association*, found that outdoor spaces promote relaxation, encourage physical activity and reduce residents’ agitation. A team at the University of Exeter Medical School in England reviewed 17 different pieces of research and concluded that gardens may help stimulate memories for people with dementia.

With an estimated 340,000 people in Texas affected by Alzheimer’s, the most common form of dementia, these findings are significant. About half of all seniors living in residential care have dementia or exhibit dementia symptoms. The findings also come at a time when caregivers are focusing on ways to improve dementia symptoms without the use of drugs.

“Agitation and aggressive behavior are symptoms that we see in some people with dementia, and those can create dangerous situations for the person as well as caregivers and family members,” said Brenda Abbott-Shultz, Vice President of Healthcare at Autumn Leaves. “Rather than simply medicating the person, our first-line approach is always to try to redirect the person to an activity or an environment that might help calm them, like gardening.”

Gardening involves gentle physical exercise, which can help reduce common dementia symptoms like poor appetite or disturbed sleep. Working in a garden also seems to tap into happy memories for many people – even when memory is otherwise impaired.

“For people with dementia, gardening calls on familiar skills that may be retained,” said Clair Jameson, Director of Life Engagement for Autumn Leaves. “A garden can take you back to a place that’s comfortable, and that can calm the resident while keeping him or her active and engaged.”

At an Autumn Leaves in another city, one resident was withdrawn and depressed when she first moved into the community. Once she discovered the garden, she spent many happy hours working there and became more active and verbal – even offering suggestions to the community’s staff for making the garden more accessible to other residents.

Gardening can pose hazards to people with dementia, as the study pointed out, because dementia impairs judgment. Some people with dementia tend to wander and get lost, and that risk can arise any time they’re outdoors. At Autumn Leaves, the garden is located in an enclosed courtyard, giving freedom of movement to residents while keeping them safe and secure.

“Gardens give our residents a calming setting and a chance to recall skills and habits they enjoyed in the past,” said Jasmon. “They really play a key role in our community.”

Autumn Leaves of West Houston is located at 1725 Eldridge Parkway in Houston. For more information, call 832-554-2800 or visit www.autumnleaves.com/communities/pearland.

ABOUT AUTUMN LEAVES

Family owned and operated memory care assisted living communities, Autumn Leaves® is dedicated to serving those living with Alzheimer’s and dementia. Autumn Leaves communities are committed to providing exceptionally high-quality care and research-based programs that allow for safe, secure, and active environments for its residents. An acknowledged leader in memory care, Autumn Leaves combines clinical expertise, knowledge of dementia, and heartfelt compassion to create the best possible care environment. Autumn Leaves currently operates 36 communities in 4 states with the ability to serve more than 1,800 residents. For more information, visit AutumnLeaves.com or call 888-662-8886.